

## MESSAGE FROM DELAINE EASTIN

ONE OF THE GOALS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION is to ensure that our students obtain the academic skills and knowledge necessary to prepare them for the twenty-first century. Another goal is to encourage our students to become good citizens in our democracy. Because service-learning combines both goals so effectively, I convened the Service-Learning Task Force in October 1997 and asked the members to think boldly about how service-learning can be infused into California's schools.


Recent research indicates that service-learning clearly has a positive impact on students' academic achievement and school success. These effects include a heightened interest in classes and an increase in personal and social responsibility. When young people feel more connected to their schools, the overall school climate improves. Students also address real community needs; and as a result, community involvement in schools increases.

California's growing diversity enriches us culturally and challenges us to discover common community values. The root of the Greek word *democracy*, or *demos*, means "people," and *kratos* means "govern." The Greeks believed that civic participation created both a better governance system and stronger individual citizens. Service-learning fosters this same positive result.

I have visited schools throughout California where I saw remarkable examples of service-learning. I met students who were restoring streams and rivers; tutoring younger students and peers in reading and mathematics; and nurturing school gardens to provide fresh vegetables to needy people, including those in homeless shelters and the elderly. I saw industrial arts students building a house for the doctors who traveled long distances to work at the rural community hospital. And I talked with high school students in an auto shop class who were providing free oil changes for low-income families.

Through service-learning, communities throughout the state are benefiting from the work of young people, and the young people themselves can use the knowledge and skills they have learned in their classrooms to improve their communities. As a teaching and learning strategy, service-learning is complex. It requires educators and community partners to collaborate and share responsibility. It means expanding the classroom beyond the schoolhouse walls and giving youth a voice in their education. Service-learning challenges adults as much as it does young people to teach and learn differently and to be involved with their community.

I would like to thank the 29 members of the task force, who spent many hours working to develop the recommendations contained in this report. They share my belief that service-learning is of tremendous value to our students and to our society. I urge educators, parents, students, and community members to embrace this strategy because through service-learning our youth will become adept learners, capable workers, and active citizens.



State Superintendent of Public Instruction